

Preventing Substance Abuse Starts at Home
Safeguarding Your Children



When it comes to drugs and alcohol, many parents worry about the outside world, like the media and children's friends. But what can be found *inside* your home is just as important. Youth say that the family home is a major source of substances like prescription drugs, alcohol, and inhalants.

By taking steps in this brochure, you can help prevent substance abuse. Common medication and household products can be abused – even by young children. It's never too early to take action!

Take a tour of your home >>>>



Take steps to protect your children:

- **Learn** about risky substances
- **Go through** your home and identify substances that might be abused
- **Replace** or remove risky products when possible
- **Put** risky substances in secure places and supervise use by children
- **Watch** your children for possible substance abuse problems, and deal with concerns right away

Inhalants

Inhalant abuse is the deliberate breathing or sniffing of gases or vapors to get "high." Over 1000 common household products can be used as inhalants. Examples include gasoline, nail polish and remover, correction fluid, and anything in an aerosol can (like air freshener or whipped cream). Computer gas dusters, used to clean computers and keyboards, are an especially dangerous inhalant.

Know the facts:

- Only 5% of parents believe their children have tried inhalants – *but 20% of children have actually tried them.*
- Inhalants are often the *first* substance children try. In Massachusetts, the average age of children first trying inhalants is just over 11 years old.

Inhalant abuse can cause death, even the first time. Inhalants can also cause weight loss, organ and brain damage, addiction, and problems with judgment and long-term memory.

Help protect your children:

- When possible, replace potential inhalants with water-based products and non-aerosol products such as pump sprays.
- Keep potential inhalants in a secure place, and watch for possible use by children.
- Model safe use of these products to your children by following product directions. Supervise children's use of these products.
- Throw away products you don't use. Find out from your city or town how to safely throw away hazardous products.
- Don't mention to your children that inhalants can be used to get "high." *Don't tell children exactly what products can be used as inhalants.*



Watch for:

- Chemical smells on breath or clothing
- Paint or other stains on face, hands, or clothes
- Hidden empty aerosol cans or solvent containers (such as paint thinner or nail polish remover)
- Items used for inhaling products, such as plastic or paper bags, rags, or balloons
- Drunk or disoriented behavior
- Attention or coordination problems
- Changes in social behavior or school performance

Prescription Drugs

Prescription drugs can be safe and helpful to people when used in the right way. But many prescription drugs can also be *abused*. Youth can get prescription drugs in their own homes, and from peers and the Internet.

The most commonly abused prescription drugs include:

- **Pain medications** such as Vicodin®, OxyContin®, Percocet®, and codeine – prescribed for people with serious, long-term pain, and sometimes to treat short-term pain.
- **Stimulants** such as Ritalin®, Concerta®, Adderall®, Dexedrine®, and Meridia® – used to treat ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and sleep disorders.
- **Sedatives and tranquilizers** such as Valium®, Xanax®, Ativan®, Klonopin®, Ambien®, Lunesta®, and barbiturates – prescribed to treat stress and anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, and seizures.

Tips for monitoring your children's use of prescription medications

If your children are prescribed medications:

- Keep control of the medication bottle, and supervise your children when they are taking medication. Count pills regularly.
- Keep the medication at home if possible. If your children need to take medication during the school day, the school (by law) must supervise use. Talk with school staff about supervision.
- Remind your children that their prescription medications are only good for them – and could hurt other children.

Watch for:

- Medications your children may have for reasons they can't explain, such as cough or cold medications, prescription drugs, or unidentifiable pills
- Missing medications
- Visits to websites where your children can order or learn about using drugs
- Changes in social behavior

Kitchen



Know the facts:

- 1 in 5 teens has abused Vicodin®
- 1 in 10 teens has abused Ritalin® or Adderall®

Prescription drug abuse can cause addiction, increased blood pressure and heart rate, seizures, organ damage, and even death.

Help protect your children:

- Store medications in a place where children can't easily get them or aren't likely to look. Monitor the number of pills or level of medicine in a bottle.
- Throw away unused and expired drugs: crush the medication (if possible), put it in its container (with a child-resistant cap), seal the container with tape, put it in 2 plastic bags, and throw in the trash. Do not flush old medications down the toilet.
- Talk with your children about the dangers of prescription drug abuse.
- Remember that you are a role model for your children, and use medications carefully.

Bedroom



A non-prescription danger: cough medicine

- 1 in 11 teens has abused cough medicine

An ingredient found in many cough medicines – dextromethorphan (DXM) – is also abused by youth. It can cause serious health problems including increased heart rate, high blood pressure, seizures, dizziness, and coma. Any product name with "DM" or "tuss" in it contains DXM. You can also look for dextromethorphan in the ingredient list.

Bathroom



Alcohol

Alcohol is commonly found in family households and is legal when used by people over 21. *Alcohol is also the most commonly abused substance by teens.*

Know the facts:

- 2 out of 3 teens say it's easy to get alcohol from their homes without their parents knowing.
- 1 in 2 8th-graders has tried alcohol

Alcohol use can cause serious health problems for teens, and it is also linked to risky behaviors, like sexual activity and violence. Other risks include long-term learning and memory problems, poor judgment, addiction, accidents and injury, and death.

Help protect your children:

- Put all alcohol in a secure place, out of children's reach.
- Monitor the levels in liquor bottles, and watch for alcohol that has been watered down.
- Don't store extra alcohol in places like the basement or garage – it's easy for bottles or cans to disappear.
- If you drink, model healthy alcohol use to your children.
- Don't support teen drinking. Don't host parties or allow your children to go to parties where alcohol is served. Make your rules and expectations clear to your children and enforce those rules.

Storage Area



Watch for:

- Bloodshot eyes, slurred speech, poor coordination
- Alcohol in your child's bedroom or backpack
- Bottles with unknown liquids inside
- Smell of alcohol on the breath
- Changes in social behavior

Basement



Learn more

Inhalants:

- **20-minute online training for parents** about inhalant abuse, product and safety tips, and how to teach children of different ages about inhalants: www.inhalantabusetraining.org (for adults only)
- **"A Parent's Guide: Preventing Inhalant Abuse Among Children and Teens,"** including a list of safer products, available at www.maclearringhouse.com or 1-800-952-6637

Prescription drugs:

- **Prescription drug information and publications:** www.nida.nih.gov/drugpages/prescription.html
- **"OxyContin: The Facts"** available at www.maclearringhouse.com or 1-800-952-6637
- **Prescription and non-prescription medication information,** including generic names: www.medlineplus.gov

Alcohol:

- **"7 Ways to Protect Your Teen from Alcohol and Other Drugs"** and other brochures available at www.maclearringhouse.com or 1-800-952-6637
- **Tips for parents** and other adults who work with children: www.stopalcoholabuse.gov

Talk with your children about drugs and alcohol, monitor their activities, and set rules and consequences. (See resources on the back page.) *Teens who hear anti-drug messages at home are less likely to use drugs.* When your children are doing well, tell them.

More guides and services

MA Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline:

Confidential information, prevention and treatment referrals. 1-800-327-5050 (toll free; 24 hours; multi-lingual) or www.helpline-online.com. In an immediate emergency, call 911.

MA Health Promotion Clearinghouse:

Free publications on how to talk with your children about substance abuse, and other health topics. 1-800-952-6637 (toll free) or www.maclearinghouse.com

Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention Serving MA and RI:

Information and hotline about inhalants and other poisons. 1-800-222-1222 (toll free; 24 hours) or www.maripoisoncenter.com

Adolescent Substance Abuse Program, Children's Hospital, Boston:

Information, diagnosis, referrals. 1-617-355-2727 or www.ceasar-boston.org

Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, MA Department of Public Health:

Information, downloadable parent and youth publications, statistics. www.mass.gov/dph/bsas/bsas.htm

Selected information sources for this brochure include: MA Department of Public Health and MA Department of Education, "MA Youth Health Survey," 2004; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: www.niaaa.nih.gov; National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign: www.mediacampaign.org; Parents. The Anti-Drug: www.theantidrug.com

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Bureau of Substance Abuse Services

Prevent Treat Recover *for Life*

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